

# Bodie, California

## Preserving a Historic Mining Landscape

**L**ocated on the eastern side of California's Sierra Nevada, in the high desert of sparsely-populated Mono County, Bodie is perhaps the best-preserved mining ghost town in the United States. W. S. Body and his partners established the first mining claims (at what would ultimately be spelled Bodie) in 1859. Before the turn of the century, the town may have attained a population of over 10,000 and produced in excess of \$30 million (in pre-World War I dollars) worth of gold. Mining continued at Bodie through several boom and bust cycles until 1942. Bodieites seemed to take their reputation for wickedness, like their whiskey, with gusto. No one from Bodie seems ever to have thought of refuting the Reverend F. M. Warrington's often-quoted description of their town as "a sea of sin, lashed by the tempest of lust and passion."\*

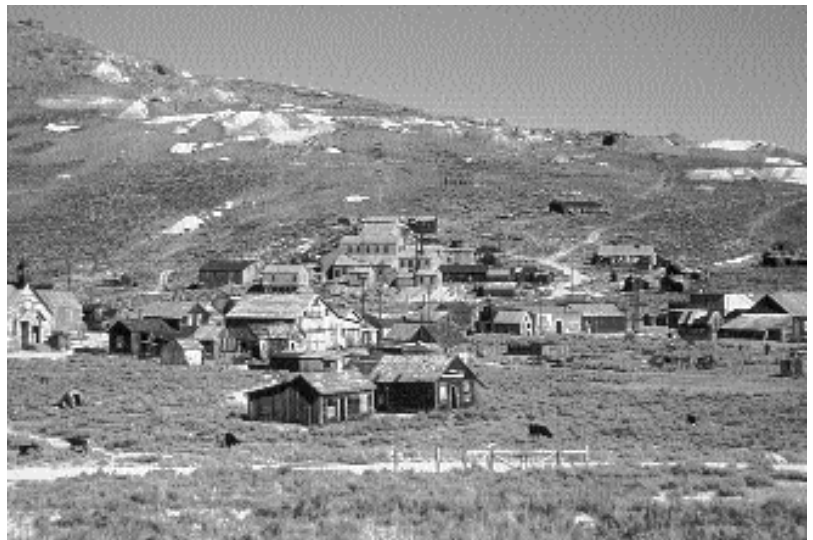
Following its boom years, sporadic mineral exploration prevented the town and surrounding mining area from being completely abandoned. The presence of a caretaker provided by the J. S. Cain Company, long-term owner of much of the town of Bodie and its mining district, helped ensure its protection from salvage and vandalism. What remains from Bodie's 83-year span of boom and bust mining activity is a 2,900-acre historic landscape, filled with remnants of ore exploration, extraction and processing activities; sheds, houses, rock shelters and tent platforms; ruins of commercial enterprises of all kinds, including a "Chinatown" and a red-light district; infrastructure supporting transportation and communication links with the outside; and myriad debris that was used, discarded, recycled, and abandoned.

In 1961, the Secretary of the Interior designated Bodie a National Historic Landmark as an excellent representative of a Western mining ghost town. The State of California, recognizing Bodie's unique value, had begun purchasing the townsite

from the Cain Company and other owners in the late 1950s. In 1962, the new Bodie State Historic Park took on the task of protecting Bodie's ghost town character and interpreting its historic qualities. By 1986 the state had acquired nearly 500 acres of the townsite, including the cemeteries and some outlying associated historical features. The California Department of Parks and Recreation worked to stabilize Bodie's remaining structures in a state of "arrested decay," even as private mineral exploration on Bodie Bluff continued on a very limited basis unbeknownst to most of the ever-increasing numbers of visitors to the park.

In mid-1988, California State Parks notified the National Park Service that the Landmark was threatened by a potential large-scale mining operation on the bluff above the townsite. Investigations revealed that the J. S. Cain Company, Lost Carcass and Buzzard Mining Company, and other adjoining property owners had leased their mineral rights and mining claims to the Bodie Consolidated Mining Company, a subsidiary of Canadian-based Galactic Resources LTD. Galactic had initiated its mineral explorations on the privately-owned Bodie Bluff and Standard Hill, situ-

*West side of Bodie Bluff, looking east from the town. The gray buildings in the center are the Standard Consolidated Stamp Mill. Photo courtesy Frank Lortie.*



ated only 500' above and a quarter-mile from the State Historic Park. Lode, mill, and placer mining claims on surrounding public land managed by the Bureau of Land Management also were being secured. Soon, Galactic would control nearly 72

square miles of the public domain in and around the State Historic Park and into Nevada. Their initial explorations centered on the heart of the historic mining district—an area containing hundreds of structures, ruins and artifacts and a labyrinth of underground tunnels remaining from the earlier mining booms, as well as remains of prehistoric occupation sites. As explorations continued, Galactic made it clear that, if the results of the exploration indicated a potential return on investment, their intentions were to conduct a large-

picked up the controversy and hundreds of people from across the United States and Europe expressed concern at the prospect of the potential destruction of Bodie and its ghost town character by an open-pit mine. The California State Park Rangers Association launched a protest and formed a committee they named “SAVE BODIE!” to thwart the mining company’s plans. Mono County residents formed the Eastern Sierra Citizens for the Protection of Bodie. The National Park Service listed Bodie in its annual report to

Congress on endangered National Historic Landmarks. The National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Wildemess Society and others also weighed in against the potential mining operation. As the debate raged, the mining company continued its explorations, revealing little about the results of its efforts or its long-term plans, while mounting a well-financed public relations campaign and beginning to fund the establishment of a local “wise use” group.

In the meantime, the NPS’s Western Regional Office discovered that the documenta-

scale mining operation at Bodie. Company representatives continuously assured their investors and the public that Bodie was a “world-class” gold deposit that could be mined as safely and as successfully as their existing gold mining operations in South Carolina, Nevada, and Colorado. While these same representatives avoided saying so publicly, subsequent documentation has confirmed the then-current local rumors that Galactic’s most economical means of mining the bluff would be through a large open-pit operation. Tons of rock would be blown free; mineral-bearing ore would be separated, crushed and gold recovered through a cyanide heap leach operation. As well as a huge open pit, acres of waste rock would be left permanently on the landscape.

The Mono County government and local residents divided on the issue of the mining operation. Many saw it as an opportunity to bring much-needed high-paying year-round jobs and income into the area. Others saw it destroying one of their major tourist attractions and a valued historic resource. Those in opposition argued that Bodie’s value as a tourist destination was an important long-term economic benefit to the county that could not be matched by any short-term mining boom which would destroy its ghost town atmosphere forever. National media reports

tation for Bodie National Historic Landmark District did not adequately describe the resources or their significance and that the Landmark lacked a boundary. Amid sulfurous fumes of controversy, the Park Service embarked on a project to improve the documentation and establish a boundary for the Landmark. Research into the history of the Bodie mining district and a reconnaissance of the historic resources within the Bodie Bowl supported a large boundary that integrated the mining remains, the adjacent residential, commercial and civic resources in the townsite, the transportation and circulation corridors that linked the mining district with the outside markets, and the local infrastructure. NPS completed draft documentation for the Landmark which described it as a mining landscape, with a boundary that encompassed the townsite, the industrial resources which included the placer, shaft and tunnel mining remains along the mineralized ridge, the mills on and around Bodie Bluff, portions of the toll roads and railroad that led into the town, and the cemeteries and historic recreational areas adjacent to the town. The core of the historic mining area, Bodie Bluff and Standard Hill, coincided with Galactic’s “exploration target area.”

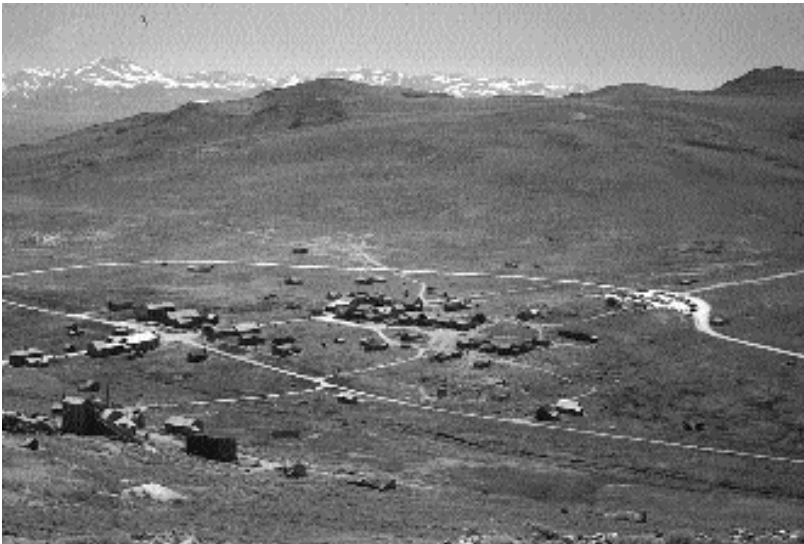
The advent of the mining threat to Bodie served as a catalyst to the State of California to

*Bodie from Standard Hill, c. 1890. Source unknown. Copy located in California Department of Parks and Recreation archives.*



seek ways of realizing one of the long-term goals of the *Bodie State Historic Park General Development and Resource Management Plan*. The goal—to secure areas surrounding the park to further protect and interpret the historic mining district, needed to be achieved in any case for the unit's protection. Once the mining company's intentions were made public, State Parks made a commitment to protecting Bodie by using existing regulatory and legislative processes. Visualizing a three-pronged approach of regulatory protection,

Bodie from Standard Hill, 1990. Photo courtesy B. Noah Tilghman, California Department of Parks and Recreation.



withdrawal of the right of new mineral entry, and ultimate acquisition if possible, State Parks felt that if they were successful with any two of the troika, they would be able to protect the integrity of the Park.

Lacking regulatory authority outside of its 264 park units to control the impacts of off-site mining upon the resources it is charged to protect, California State Parks made an effort to participate in the upcoming Mono County General Plan and mining policy development. State Parks initiated a campaign to educate other resource agencies in the state as well as the public, and conducted numerous field trips to the site for decision-makers. Coincidentally, the Bureau of Land Management's Bishop Resource Area was initiating its Resource Management Plan effort and both State Parks and the NPS worked closely with BLM to document the historic values of the Bodie Bowl in the agency's Resource Management Plan and indicate concerns about large-scale mining projects within the Bodie Bowl.

With the threat of an open pit mine, SAVE BODIE! was able to gather enough support to pass a Joint Resolution of the California Legislature. Though lacking the force of law, this formal statement expressed California's concern with the impacts that large-scale mining might have on

Bodie and to request that the President and Congress protect the ghost town character, ambiance, historic buildings, and scenic attributes of Bodie and nearby areas and withdraw the right of new patent or mineral entry on public lands of the Bodie district. Concurrently, the Bureau of Land Management completed its Resource Management Plan for the Bishop Resource Area, which recognized the Bodie Bowl as an "Area of Critical Environmental Concern" (ACEC) for its historical values and which also recommended a

small mineral withdrawal on the opposite side of the State Historic Park from Galactic's operations. Six months later California State Parks was able to open very preliminary discussions with Galactic regarding the possibility of public acquisition of their properties at Bodie.

By early 1992 the Mono County Board of Supervisors achieved a preservation-oriented position toward Bodie. While not eliminating the possibility of mining or other development at Bodie, they called for creation of land use policy recommendations for

the area as part of the update of the Mono County General Plan. BLM, which was charged with producing a management plan for the ACEC, joined forces with the County to create a joint program. In November 1992, the County and BLM established an advisory committee of local citizens, which included representatives from the mining industry, developers, environmentalists, local landowners, the tourism industry and California State Parks, to help create the policy framework. The committee began its task by developing a statement of the "Bodie Experience," in order to define what it wished to protect:

Nowhere in America can a person better journey back in time to experience a legendary Western boom town than in the historic mining region of Bodie. As we walk the streets and view the structures and surrounding landscape, we begin to understand frontier life of the 1880s—the searing heat, the bitter cold, the sound of the wind, the eerie quiet, and the final isolation of the cemetery. This experience helps us comprehend the place, events, and people of various cultures and ethnic backgrounds contributing to the American spirit of fact and myth. Bodie offers an individual the unique opportunity to discover and experience the special sense of

place suspended in time ... free from the sights and sounds of contemporary intrusion ... This is the Bodie experience.

The group worked for two years, producing a final planning document in mid-1995.

Simultaneously with initiation of the local planning efforts, California Congressmen Lehman and Miller introduced the first of three bills to legislate additional protection of Bodie in response to California's joint legislative resolution. Opposed by Galactic, but supported by testimony from SAVE BODIE!, local, state and national conservation and historical organizations, the bill passed the House of Representatives but failed in Senate committee due to the opposition of California's Senator John Seymour. Re-introduced by Senators Feinstein and Boxer and Congressman Miller in the opening days of the 104th Congress, the Bodie protection bill once again seemed destined to oblivion in the Senate due to opposition of Congressional and mining interests who perceived it as a preamble to mining law reform, until it was amended onto the coattails of Feinstein's soon-to-be-successful S-21.

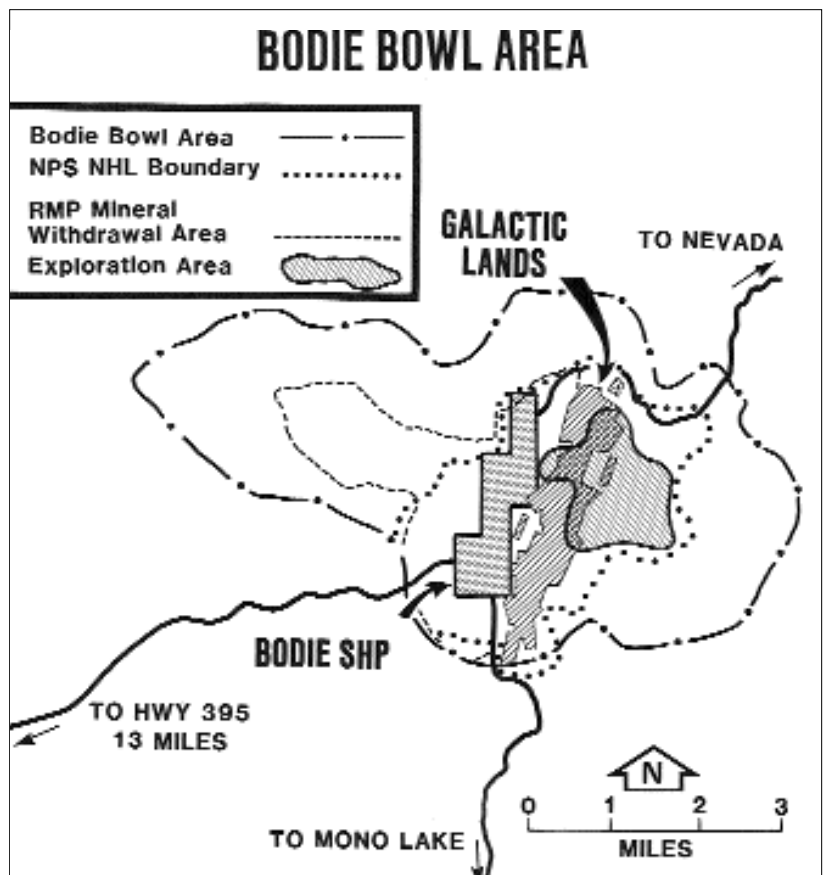
President Clinton's signing into law, on Halloween 1994, of Senator Feinstein's California Desert Protection Act creating the Mojave National Preserve, also established the Bodie Protection Act of 1994 to safeguard the ghost town of Bodie. Containing many of the elements requested by California's legislative resolution, this act prohibited patenting of mineral claims, required that existing mineral claims be reviewed, and that any claims found to be valid be subject to regulations no less stringent than those administering mining within national parks. The act also required the Department of the Interior to carry out a study as to how Bodie could be further protected "including but not limited to acquisition of lands ...."

The impact of the legislative mineral withdrawal was softened somewhat by the December 1992 bankruptcy of Galactic Resources. This was brought on by their liability for a huge chemical leak at their Summitville operation in Colorado which is alleged to have sterilized nearly 17 miles of the

Alamosa River, and which has current estimates exceeding \$160 million in clean-up costs. The mining threat at Bodie did not disappear with Galactic's bankruptcy, however, as the company's Bodie property interests were placed in the hands of a Canadian bankruptcy trustee whose fiduciary responsibility was to market the mining claims to the highest bidder.

With the passage of the Bodie Protection Act, the Bureau of Land Management acted promptly to determine the validity of the existing mining claims. The agency completed its draft mining regulations for the Bodie Bowl in late 1996. State Parks redoubled its efforts to acquire the critical mineral properties from the Galactic trustee. These negotiations were initially crushed in June 1994, with voter rejection of California's Proposition 180, which would have supplied much-needed park acquisition and improvement funding for Bodie and a multitude of other projects statewide. In spite of this seemingly insurmountable setback, California State Parks chose to seek alternative avenues to keep fighting for Bodie's future. First by themselves, then as success built upon itself, in cooperation with the Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service, a variety of state, federal, and private funding sources were identified and secured. None of these sources by itself was sufficient, but collectively a package was assembled which met the require-

*Map showing Bodie Bowl area; NPS NHL boundary; Resource Management Plan withdrawal area; State Historic Park; Galactic Lands; and Exploration area. Courtesy California Department of Parks and Recreation.*



ments of the Galactic bankruptcy trustee and State Parks was able to consummate an agreement for the purchase of the property.

Bodie, at least superficially, meets the definition of a ghost town which is, according to the *Random House College Dictionary*, "a community permanently abandoned by its inhabitants." However, the threat which has loomed over it during the last nine years has shown that Bodie continues to be inhabited by a spirit more substantial than any of its ghosts. While Bodie may be empty of inhabitants, it has never been deserted by them. We have discovered that there is a dispersed worldwide spirit of shared interest which has never abandoned this special place. This interest cuts not only across space but across economic and bureaucratic boundaries. Though sometimes separated by distance and ideology, when their town is threatened Bodie's protectors draw together in a partnership to channel their collective energies to its defense, just as any society would do in the face of an impending menace. Thanks to them, Bodie has achieved an initial crit-

ical acquisition. But additional work is necessary to complete the property purchase and to stabilize structures before Bodie can be considered "saved".

Nonetheless, there is cause for celebration. In September 1997, the 35th anniversary of Bodie State Historic Park, a re-dedication of the unit will be held on the historic and now-preserved hills overlooking the town as the park is doubled in size and the golden heart of the district is finally returned to the public for its protection, education and enjoyment.

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#### Note

\* Bodie Park Brochure, California Department of Parks and Recreation, Resource Management Division.

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Lou Ann Speulda

## Midway National Historic Landmark: Transfer and Transformation

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In 1993, after more than 50 years of service, the U.S. Navy closed its Naval Air Facility at Midway, pursuant to the Base Realignment and Closure Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-510). In 1996, the atoll was officially transferred to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Midway Atoll is at the northern end of the Hawaiian island chain, approximately 1,250 miles northwest of Honolulu. Midway comprises a roughly circular outer reef approximately 5 miles in diameter that encloses a central lagoon and two main islands, Sand and Eastern. The Atoll's exceptional ecosystem supports the largest Laysan albatross colony in the world, the second largest black-footed albatross colony, at least 13 other species of migratory seabirds, four species of migratory shorebirds, endangered Hawaiian monk seals, threatened green sea turtles, and a diversity of other marine species. Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) was established in 1988 to

meet federal responsibilities for migratory and marine species.

Midway Atoll was the site of the Battle of Midway, considered to be the turning point of World War II in the Pacific, reversing the tide of Japanese expansion and reviving U.S. military morale. Ten structures directly related to the Battle were commemorated in 1986 as a National Historic Landmark (NHL).

In 1995, the Navy identified and evaluated 64 additional properties remaining on Midway that are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. In order to handle the complicated issues and adverse effects of transferring the 74 historic properties from the Navy to the USFWS, a Programmatic Agreement (PA) was developed. The PA, initially generated by the Navy, received input from the USFWS, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (Council), the National Park Service, the State Historic Preservation Officer of the State of Hawaii, the Sixth Defense Battalion, the U.S.